DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 197 JC 030 310

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TITLE	Articulation and Transfer: How Successful Is It in Missouri and Maryland?
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	19p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Articulation (Education); Community Colleges; Prior Learning; *Transfer Policy; Transfer Rates (College) ; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This report examines the articulation and transfer policies of Maryland and Missouri and reviews the extent to which these guidelines provide for a seamless transition between community colleges and state universities. The author begins by defining the key concepts relevant to this study (e.g., transfer, articulation, native student, transfer student) and outlining a common transfer framework that serves as the foundation of this analysis. The four essential elements of this framework are: (1) the joining of two ore more segments or sectors of education; (2) the movement of students from one institution to another; (3) the gaining institution must recognize and accept course work conducted at another institution; and (4) many interested partied must participate in the process. The report then summarizes the key organizations and documents that govern transfer and articulation policies in Maryland and Missouri and calls attention to the lack of a statewide articulation and transfer agreement or common course numbering system in either state. As a result, transfer and articulation decisions are open to debate, a fact that prevents the establishment of a seamless transition between community colleges and state universities. (Contains 18 references.) (RC)

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ED 477 197

Articulation and Transfer: How Successful is it in Missouri and Maryland?

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Articulation and Transfer: How Successful is it in Missouri and Maryland?

Introduction

Community college students are matriculating to four-year public universities to pursue a bachelors' degree with the hope the degree will provide access to higher paying jobs and greater opportunities. For the past 100 years, the community college has been the starting point for millions of students in pursuit of the academic credentials to support a higher quality of life. The student who earns an associate degree at a community college may want to continue his or her education and receive a bachelors' degree from the state university system. To do so, the student must understand the articulation and transfer policies in place. This paper will focus on the articulation and transfer policies of Maryland and Missouri. Are the articulation and transfer policies of Maryland and Missouri designed to provide a seamless transition between community colleges and state universities? This key question will be answered.

Definitions

Defining the terms of transfer, articulation, native student, transfer student, receiving institution, and sending institution is required for the understanding of articulation and transfer policies and processes. A study of the literature on articulation and transfer is needed to ensure understanding of the terms and concepts. The definitions provide a common framework in which to make comparisons and contrasts between the two state programs.

There are many definitions offered by scholars who have examined the transfer process within higher education. For the purpose of this paper, the transfer process is defined by a combination of two definitions of transfer provided by Eaton (1996) and the Florida Department of Education (Pathways, 2001). Eaton defines transfer as:

> the movement of students from one institution to another. Students take certain packages of academic experiences from one institution and request that another institution formally recognize these packages—whether made up of courses, programs, or degrees. Transfer is a complex activity involving students, faculty, administrators, at least two institutions,

many departmental interests, and perhaps even state regulations. (p. 559)

Another definition of transfer provided by the Florida Department of Education adds one more aspect in defining transfer. The Florida Department of Education (Pathways, 2001) defines articulation as "the joining of two or more segments or sectors of education" (p. 1).

Combining the definitions of transfer provided by Eaton (1996) and the Florida Department of Education (Pathways, 2001) allows for the development an all-encompassing definition of transfer. The definition of transfer has four main elements. They are:

- The joining of two or more segments or sectors of education.
- The movement of students from one institution to another.
- The gaining institution must recognize and accept course work conducted at another institution.
- Many interested parties must participate in the process.

This definition of transfer will be used as the yardstick to compare and contrast the articulation and transfer policies of Missouri and Maryland.

Cohen and Brawer (Policies, 1996) claim a primary responsibility of the community college is to facilitate student transfer to a four-year institution. Based on an eight-year study, Cohen and Brawer provided data that the community college transfer rate was about 22 % nationally. The demand for an educated workforce places greater emphasis on increasing the transfer rate across the nation. Cohen and Brawer offer that improved advising and counseling, faculty support, and open transfer policies and programs at the four-year institution will support the needed increase in transfer rates.

There are many categories of transfer students that must be defined. London (1996) defines the "first generation community college student as a student who attends a community college and whose parents have not obtained a college degree" (p. 9). London argues that first generation community college transfer students are at risk of not transferring to a four-year institution due to exposure to new ideas and lifestyles and become alienated from family support. The first generation transfer student has self-doubts about academic capabilities and motivation

to strive toward a college degree. The first generation community college student will have to overcome self-doubts to successfully transfer to a four-year institution. London also indicates that community colleges have a responsibility to provide enhanced counseling and advising services to assist the first generation transfer student. Faculty and administrators must be committed to assisting first generation transfer students and respond appropriately to their needs.

The native student, as defined by Carlan and Byxbe (2000), is a student who began their higher educational studies at a four-year institution and has not transferred to another institution of higher education. The transfer student is one who began their studies at a community college and has transferred academic credit to a four-year institution. The sending institution is a community college where the student earned transferable academic credit to be accepted by the four-year institution. The receiving institution in where a transfer student wants to enroll and have academic credit earned at a community college accepted at the four-year institution.

Barkley (1993) indicates that articulation efforts are even more critical now than they were in the past. The author states that "public accountability for higher education combined with reduced levels of funding make it imperative that the nation's community colleges and four-year institutions (private as well as public) communicate, collaborate, and cooperate in the delivery of higher education" (¶ 2). Manzo (1998) reports that in many states, the "community college administrators are working hard at hammering out articulation agreements with their university neighbors" (¶ 38). Manzo also points out that many states are now directing state articulation policies to ensure accountability to the taxpayer and provide increase transfer opportunities. The community colleges and four-year institutions are being forced by state directives to better facilitate articulation of college courses. Welsh and Kjorlien (2001) indicate that 43 states have some form of an automated system for potential transfer students to review transfer and articulation policies and programs within their state.

Cohen and Brawer (Collegiate, 1996) provided a framework for articulation. The articulation process of developing and reviewing curriculum and coursework rests with the faculty at the sending and receiving institutions to determine course comparability. The

community college and university faculty is responsible for reviewing course content and authorizing acceptance of specific courses, sequence of courses, and programs for transferring students. Once this review and formal written acceptance process has occurred, a course, sequence of courses, or programs are said to have been articulated. The content of the courses at the community college assumes the necessary background and preparation has occurred to allow the student to progress to the next level of instruction at the four-year university.

Ignash and Townsend (2000) provided seven guiding principles for the establishment of a strong statewide articulation agreement. The seven principles are:

- Parity among institutions - community colleges and four-year institutions are equal partners.
- Parity of students - native and transfer students are treated equally by receiving institutions.
- Faculty have primary responsibility for developing actual statewide articulation agreements.
- Accommodate students who transfer without an associate degree.
- Develop agreements to transfer program majors and program major courses.
- Private colleges and universities participate in statewide agreement.
- Data driven evaluation on statewide articulation agreement. (¶ 6-8)

The seven guiding principles will be used to compare and contrast the articulation agreements of Missouri and Maryland.

Missouri Articulation and Transfer Policies

The Missouri Department of Higher Education has created the Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE). The role of the CBHE is to develop and coordinate common policies and practices for the entire higher education structure within Missouri. Through state statute, the CBHE is required to "establish guidelines to promote and facilitate the transfer of students between institutions of higher education within the state" (Missouri Transfer Guidelines, 2001, P.1). Once the guidelines have been approved, the CBHE will ensure coordinated

implementation. The CBHE has established a sub commission entitled the Commission on Articulation and Transfer (COTA). The COTA develops, reviews, and coordinates all policies relating to articulation and transfer for approval by the CBHE. Through the coordinating efforts of the CBHE, articulation and transfer policies are implemented in Missouri. Recent changes have been made to establish a common policy for all the community colleges and four-year institutions for articulation and transfer. The changes in Missouri policy caused the development of a set of principles of good practice for articulation and transfer.

Missouri's *Principles of Good Practice for Transfer and Articulation* (1998) lists six principles that have been adopted by the Missouri Department of Higher Education. All Missouri two-year and four-year institutions of higher education are using the principles to develop articulation and transfer agreements between the public and private institutions of higher education. The six principles are:

I. All policies and procedures relating to transfer and articulation should be easily understood, readily available, and widely distributed among students, faculty, and staff.

II. The transfer process should be efficient, predictable, and sensitive to student needs.

III. The transfer process should treat both native and transfer students equitably.

IV. The faculty role in developing and maintaining curricula must be respected; revisions to existing articulation agreements should occur in a timely fashion, using consultative and collegial processes.

V. Transfer and articulation agreements should reinforce the respective missions of associate and baccalaureate institutions.

VI. The transfer process should provide for the resolution of any disagreements regarding the application of interpretation of articulation agreements or practices as expeditiously as possible, and the resolution should avoid placing an undue burden on students. (¶ 1-6)

Missouri does not have a common statewide articulation and transfer agreement that all public institution of higher education must follow. The six principles are provided as guidance for the development of individual articulation and transfer agreements between two-year and four-year institutions.

The first principle is designed to provide guidance to the higher education institutions on the development of individual articulation and transfer agreements. The first principle of good practice (Principles, 1998) indicates that:

> a well-functioning system of transfer and articulation depends upon meaningful collaboration of educational partners between sending and receiving institutions in the development of agreements. This collaboration should include the exchange of pertinent information, such as catalogs, course syllabi, course outlines, learning outcomes, and/or curriculum guides in an open and timely fashion. Transfer and articulation agreements may apply to whole programs or to a course-by course arrangement. To the extent possible, institutions are encouraged to address transfer, articulation, and course-equivalency issues, as well as program or degree requirements, based on learning outcomes or competencies. (p.1)

The state policy of allowing higher education institutions to develop individual articulation and transfer agreements does not set a common standard for all of Missouri's transfer students. The success of the six guiding principles in the development of the individual agreements should be reflected in the transfer data through the numbers of students that transfer. The Fall 2001 data (Summary, 2001) on undergraduate transfer indicates that 10,171 students transferred to Missouri's public two-year and four-year institutions. Private college and university transfers were 2,233 students. Out-of-state transfers equaled 6,436 students. The data reflects that 24 % or 19,643 students transferred. This transfer data indicates that the guiding principles are effective in enhancing student articulation and transfer.

The second principle of sensitive to student needs deals with the impact on transferring students between institutions. "Interpretation and application of transfer and articulation

agreements should emphasize the importance of a student-centered approach by all institutions" (Principles, 1998, p. 1). This is an important element of a student centered articulation agreement. The additional guidance contained within the second principle of "once developed and agreed to by institutions, existing transfer and articulation agreements are binding on all parties until they are formally modified through an appropriate, consultative process" (Principles, 1998, p. 2) is a protection offered to transferring students.

The third principle ensures transfer students receive equal treatment and protection as native students in all Missouri higher education institutions. The guidance of the CBHE (Principles, 1998) provides the following protection:

> Every student, either native or transfer, must, upon entering an institution, meet all institutional requirements to continue as a "student in good standing." An institution's requirements to maintain the status of "student in good standing" may vary in such things as continuous enrollment, change of major, or admission to programs. (p. 2)

This equal protection is an important element of any articulation and transfer agreement.

Richardson (1993) postulates that faculty are either a "silent partner or a missing link" (¶ 6) in the articulation process. The author indicates that state governing bodies or administrators have taken the lead in developing articulation agreements. However, the fourth Missouri good practice (Principles, 1998) directs that faculty be involved within the articulation process.

> In the process of developing transfer and articulation agreements, faculty within the respective disciplines must be involved in consultative and collegial processes as early as possible. Furthermore, when establishing new agreements and/or revising existing agreements, institutions must exchange information essential for informed timely decision-making by the faculty from both sending and receiving institutions. (p. 2)

The fifth good practice indicates that individual schools should develop a common course numbering system through an articulation agreement. The CBHE Principles of Good Practice for Articulation and Transfer (Principles, 1998) indicates that:

> Each institution participating in the CBHE's transfer and articulation agreement will

> clearly publicize and widely disseminate its course-numbering system. Distinctive numbering ranges should be identified for remedial courses and freshman-, sophomore-, junior-, and senior-level courses. A high level of commonality in course-numbering procedures will be sought to facilitate the interpretation of transcripts. (p. 3)

The lack of a statewide common course numbering system indicates that a strong advising and counseling process is needed to support the transferring student. The transferring student will need this support to determine what courses will transfer and those that will not.

The last principle allows for an articulation and transfer appeals process for the Missouri higher educational institutions. The CBHE Commission on Transfer and Articulation is directed to review appeals between sending and receiving institutions concerning issues between schools. Any institution may request, on behalf of a student or for itself, a review and decision on an issue between a sending and receiving institutions.

The Principles of Good Practice for Transfer and Articulation (Principles, 1998) are a step in the right direction toward a seamless statewide transfer and articulation process. However, a comprehensive statewide articulation and transfer process is still needed that truly supports student transfer. The Missouri articulation and transfer policies are based on individual agreements between institutions of higher education. The state does not have a common statewide articulation and transfer agreement. Missouri does not have a common course numbering system that can allow the potential transfer student to easily determine if exact or comparable courses offered by the community college are identical to those offered by the four-year institutions. The lack of a state mandated common articulation agreements allow transfer students to be consumed in an extensive research on where and what college courses will transfer.

Maryland Articulation and Transfer Policies

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) has direct responsibility for transfer and articulation policies and programs. The *2000 Maryland State Plan for Postsecondary Education* (2001) outlines eight statewide postsecondary education goals of

"quality, access, economic development, research, teacher education, diversity, information technology, and accountability" (p. 4). Each of the eight state goals has many related objectives with corresponding strategies to obtain the objective. This process allows for all stakeholders of Maryland's higher education to understand the direction, responsibilities, and tasks they are directed to meet.

Several of the state goals have specifically identified objectives and strategies aimed at meeting articulation and transfer needs. The 2000 Maryland State Plan (2001) lists the following objectives and strategies that affect articulation and transfer:

> 2.34 Strategy – Develop "two plus two" curricula collaboratively, particularly in underserved areas.
>
> 6.11 Strategy – Improve the retention, graduation and transfer rate of African American and other minority students whose achievement trails the state average.
>
> 8.2 Objective – Reaffirm and strengthen articulation and transfer agreements among all postsecondary institutions.
>
> 8.12 Strategy – Remove institutional barriers that unnecessarily delay the degree progress of students.
>
> 8.4 Objective – Facilitate collaboration between and among states, institutions, colleges, schools, business, industries, and governments to improve efficiencies and expanded opportunities. (pp. 23, 27-29)

The MHEC does allow each higher education institution to determine how to incorporate the goals, objectives and strategies into their mission and planning process. The objectives and strategies provides guidance to community colleges and universities to provide real opportunities for transfer and articulation within Maryland.

In Maryland, a student may transfer from the community college to the four-year university without loss of time or duplication of courses. Maryland has established a set of five principles to ensure transferability. The principles are (Student, 2001):

- Maryland community college students who have completed the associate degree or

students who have completed 56 semester hours of credit with a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or higher on a scale of 4.0 shall not be denied direct transfer to a Maryland public four-year institution .

- Courses taken at a Maryland community college as part of a recommended transfer program will ordinarily be applicable to related programs at a Maryland public institution granting the baccalaureate degree.
- The General Education Program a student takes at one public college or university will transfer without further review to another public institution without the need for a course-to-course match. That is, courses that are designated as general education by a sending institution will transfer as general education, even if the receiving institution does not offer that specific course or has not designated that course as general education.
- Courses designated as meeting the general education requirements at any Maryland public college shall be applicable to the general education requirements at any other Maryland public college or university.
- Credit earned in or transferred from an associate degree-granting institution shall be limited approximately one-half the baccalaureate degree program requirement, not to exceed 70 credits, and to the first two years of the undergraduate educational experience. (pp. 1-2)

The 1996 community college transfer data as provided by the *Retention, Graduation and Transfer Rates at Maryland Community Colleges* (Filipp, 2001) indicates that "10,905 new full-time freshman matriculating in fall 1996, 23.9 % transferred to a Maryland public four-year college" (p. 1). This amounts to 2,606 students that transferred to a public university. The data for 1998 indicates that only 1,435 (12.2 %) of 11,770 freshman students transferred.

The MHEC revised the statewide transfer and articulation policy in 1995 in order to reduce growing dissatisfaction. The potential transfer student has a state directed policy to ensure sending and receiving institutions provided realistic transfer and articulation for the

student. According to Tschechtelin (1997), the MHEC made four major changes to the articulation and transfer policy to facilitate the ease of transfer for Maryland's students. The changes were:

(1) the Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees would require a minimum of 30 credits and a maximum of 36 credits of general education,

(2) a student transferring to a public four-year institution who has completed the 30 to 36 lower-division credits would be required to take a maximum of 46 general education for the Bachelor of Arts of Bachelor of Science degrees,

(3) a student who has taken any part of the 30 to 36 lower-division general education credits at a public college or university would receive lower-division general education credit for those courses successfully completed at any public institution to which that student transfers, and

(4) All institutions would use common definitions and guidelines in determining which course could be offered for general education credits. (¶ 27)

The policy changes created a common articulation and transfer guidelines for 16 community colleges, 13 public four-year universities, and 21 private four-year universities.

The *Student Guide to Transfer among Maryland Colleges and Universities* (2001) stipulates that higher educational institutions have individual transfer and articulation agreements with each other, that incorporate the four state mandated policy directives. The individual articulation agreements can be accessed on the Internet through Maryland's Articulation System (ARTSYS) system. The transfer student can review the agreements and conduct an analysis of what courses will transfer to the receiving institution. The student can use the ARTSYS to review the transferability of courses and identify the equivalent course at the receiving institution for courses completed at the sending institution. ARTSYS is designed for the transfer student to enter his or her courses taken at the sending institution to determine the transferability of courses to the receiving institution. The student is also strongly encouraged to discuss transfer concerns

and issues with a Transfer Coordinator at the sending institution. The Transfer Coordinator is the expert on how to transfer and what will articulate.

Conclusion

Missouri and Maryland do not have a statewide articulation and transfer agreement or common course numbering system. The states rely on providing guidance through a set of principles and guidance for the development of series of individual articulation and transfer agreements between higher educational institutions. The effectiveness of the articulation and transfer policies of Maryland and Missouri can be measured by the yardsticks provided by Eaton (1996), Florida Department of Education (Pathways, 2001) and Ignash and Townsend (2000).

Using Eaton (1996) and the Florida Department of Education (Pathways, 2001) definitions of transfer, both Missouri and Maryland have met all elements of the combined definition. Both states, through the MHEC and CBHE, use their transfer principles and published policies to ensure the joining of the many sectors of the educational structure. I have focused only on the linkage of community college to university, however, both states also link K-16 as a feature of their transfer policy. The movement of students from one institution to another does occur in both states. Missouri has a more effective transfer policy based on sheer numbers of 10,171 students transferring to public colleges or universities. Maryland had 1,435 students transfer to public institutions. The difference in the transfer numbers may be slightly influenced by the reporting years, but the greater number of students in Missouri indicates that the transfer process is more viable than Maryland's process.

Missouri and Maryland did not establish a statewide policy of articulation. Both states provided guidance on the articulation process, but left the acceptance of course work to the receiving institution. The effectiveness of the articulation guidance can be judged by the numbers of transferring students. Maryland literature highlighted an extensive student appeal process for the articulation of courses or programs. Maryland also strongly encourages students to interact with a Transfer Coordinator and use the ARTSYS software to ease transfer to the receiving institution. The Missouri literature did not provide a transfer appeal process as

complicated as Maryland's. This would indicate that the Missouri's articulation process is student friendly. Both states required direct involvement of the faculty in reviewing the curricula, courses, and programs for articulation and transfer. Missouri and Maryland did include all interested parties in the articulation and transfer process.

The seven guiding principles provided by Ignash and Townsend (2000) can be used as the evaluation yardstick for the Missouri and Maryland articulation agreements. "Parity among institutions - community colleges and four-year institutions are equal partners" (¶ 6). The articulation and transfer principles presented by each state does support parity between community colleges and universities. The stated policies did not favor one type of institution over another. "Parity of students - native and transfer students are treated equally by receiving institutions" (¶ 7). Missouri clearly stated that native and transfer students would be treated equitably. Maryland did not specify parity of students, however, there was no mention that they should not be treated the same. In Maryland, the student transfer numbers were considerably less than Missouri was. This would indicate that transfer students were not readily accepted at the receiving institution, and therefore not treated equitably.

Ignash and Townsend (2000) also stated "faculty have primary responsibility for developing actual statewide articulation agreements" (¶ 6). There was not a statewide articulation agreement for all courses in either state. Missouri (Missouri, 2001) did have a common agreement for 42 credit hours of general education courses. Maryland (Students, 2001) directed 30-36 general education credit hours would be transferred. Both states required sending individual institutions to develop articulation agreements with receiving institutions. In Missouri and Maryland, the faculty was charged with developing individual articulation agreements.

One of Ignash and Townsend's (2000) guiding principles required articulation to "accommodate students who transfer without an associate degree" (¶ 7). Both states required students with associate degrees would be allowed to transfer. Missouri and Maryland articulation and transfer principles indicated that students without an associate degree could also transfer to a receiving institution. Maryland (Students, 2001) allowed up to 70 credit hours to

transfer, but had a review process to decide what courses would transfer beyond the initial 30-36 general education courses.

Ignash and Townsend (2000) provides additional principles for comparison. "Develop agreements to transfer program majors and program major courses " (¶ 8). The Missouri and Maryland transfer guides did allow for courses and program majors to transfer. The individual transfer agreements would specify what programs and courses would transfer in both states. Maryland posted, on the ARTSYS information system, the programs and courses that would transfer. Missouri also had a similar Internet based system to review transfer courses and programs based on individual articulation agreements. "Private colleges and universities participate in statewide agreement " (¶ 8). Missouri and Maryland incorporated the private institutions into the state articulation and transfer principles. "Data driven evaluation on statewide articulation agreement " (¶ 8). Statistical data was available on transfer rates in numerous categories from both states. However, evaluation of the data was not available on the effectiveness of the articulation agreements. Some type of financial incentive or penalty for receiving institutions to accept transfer students based on a data driven evaluation would ease the transfer process and enhance the articulation of programs and courses.

The Eaton (1996) and Florida Department of Education (Pathways, 2001) combined definition of transfer indicated that there were no major differences in either state affecting student transfer to receiving institutions. Using Ignash and Townsend's (2000) seven guiding principles provided an excellent assessment tool to measure the articulation policies of Missouri and Maryland. The assessment of both states indicates that Missouri has a better-defined set of articulation and transfer principles. Both states did not have a statewide articulation agreement and relied on individual articulation agreements between institutions. However, Missouri does have a slight edge over Maryland on articulation and transfer based on the greater number of student transfers.

Are the articulation and transfer policies of Maryland and Missouri designed to provide a seamless transition between community colleges and state universities? Missouri and Maryland

do not have a seamless transition between community colleges and state universities. Without a statewide mandated articulation and transfer policy, transfer and articulation will be debatable. Both state programs only allow for 42 credit hours for Missouri and 30-36 credit hours of general education for Maryland to seamlessly transfer. All other courses or programs are reviewed by the faculty to determine what will transfer and what will not. This does not allow for a seamless transfer and articulation between community colleges and state universities.

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